Mentzer Documents from Germany

In the fall of 1974, I, with the assistance of some friends in Germany, had the good fortune to obtain photocopies of the original documents granting permission to Johannes Mentzer and his family and to several others to emigrate from Hagsfeld to Pennsylvania. The originals are in the files of the Generallandesarchiv of Baden located in Karlsruhe, W. Germany. They consist of six pages, each measuring 10 X 15 inches. I copied the pages I received by xerox in sections with some reduction in size. The result was 11 pages in script which are attached.

Because I knew no one who could read this old German script, I engaged a well-qualified man in Hagsfeld, now a section within the city of Karlsruhe, to transcribe the documents into German in roman type, word for word and line for line as in the originals. To simplify the comparing of the pages of the script and of the transliterations, my correspondent numbered the lines on both. He showed great forethought, too, in providing two pages of Erläuterungen, the explanations or definitions of words which are now obsolete. Finally, the documents in roman type were translated into English by Mr. Noah S. Good of the Lancaster Mennonite Conference Historical Society, Lancaster, Pa.

These documents show that a Todtfall (now Toddesfall = in case of death) was a tax levied on the possessions of an adult when he died - a horse or cow if a man, the best set of clothes if a woman. This tax was widely spread in Europe in varying degrees at different times and places. Anyone emigrating also had to pay this tax even though there wasn't really a death. (You can't escape taxes.) However, these papers show that in this case, at least, not all of those about to emigrate were taxed. Both Johannes Meinzer and his married son Johannes paid, but there was no levy on the members of their families.

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